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AmEmbassy TEHRAN

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INCOMING TELEGRAM

CONTROL NO. 6812

ACTION

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHCO/SECSTATE WASHDC HIACI IMMEDIATE 7634
INFO RUSSOD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 7075
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE 944
RUSSDAR/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 5510
RUSSDAR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE 6113

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ICA 1
COMS _____
OR 1
2. U. 11652: QDS
TOS: PGOV, PEPER, PINT, AF, US
SUBJECT: FIRST CONVERSATION WITH NEW AFGHAN PRESIDENT

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-12-44

1. MR. MOHAMMAD TARAKI, THE PRESIDENT OF AFGHANISTAN'S NEW REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, AND HE LIKES TO BE CALLED "MR. PRESIDENT," RECEIVED ME ALONE IN HIS OFFICE AT THE OLD PRIME MINISTRY BUILDING AT 5 P.M. ON MAY 6. I WAS RECEIVED AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE BUILDING BY THE SAME CHIEF AND DEPUTY CHIEF OF PROTOCOL WHO HAD SERVED THE PREVIOUS REGIME. AS AN INDICATION OF THE TIMES, THE DEPUTY CHIEF, WHO IS A MOHAMMADZAI, STARTED WEEPING WHEN I ASKED HIM ABOUT HIS FAMILY. IT WAS IN THIS MOOD THAT HE USHERED ME INTO HIS NEW CHIEF'S OFFICE. SECURITY PRECAUTIONS SEEMED TO BE MINIMAL, WITH ONLY ONE ARMORED VEHICLE VISIBLE IN THE COMPOUND OF THE PRIME MINISTRY.

2. TARAKI GREETED ME WITH A WARM HANDSHAKE AND A FRIENDLY SMILE, DULY RECORDED BY PHOTOGRAPHERS. WE THEN SAT DOWN IN THE CORNER OF HIS OFFICE AND EXCHANGED A FEW PLEASANTRIES WHILE OUR PICTURES CONTINUED TO BE SNAPPED. I GOT A GOOD LAUGH FROM HIM WHEN I SAID I WAS SORRY I HAD NOT MET HIM DURING MY FOUR AND ONE-HALF YEARS IN AFGHANISTAN -- AND EVEN SORRIER DURING THE PAST NINE DAYS. TARAKI SPOKE EXCELLENT, IF SOMEWHAT RUSTY, ENGLISH.

3. TARAKI BEGAN HIS CONVERSATION BY RECOUNTING WITH OBVIOUS PRIDE AND RELISH THE SUCCESS OF HIS REVOLUTION, STRESSING THAT IT IS A REVOLUTION AND NOT A COUP. HE SAID ON THURSDAY, APRIL 27, THE TANKS FIRST MOVED IN THE DIRECTION OF KABUL ABOUT 9 A.M., BUT TOOK MORE THAN TWO HOURS TO REACH THE CENTER OF THE CITY. BY EVENING, THE DAUD REGIME HAD LOST THE BATTLE, ALTHOUGH THEY TRIED IN VAIN DURING THE NIGHT TO SEND REINFORCEMENTS FROM CENTRAL CORPS HEADQUARTERS AND FROM KARGHA. WITH THE COMING OF DAWN, HE SAID, THE AIR FORCE WAS ABLE TO FINISH THE JOB. HOWEVER, WITHIN THE PALACE DAUD HAD BEEN ASKED TO SURRENDER, BUT REFUSED. SHOT AT HIS ATTACKERS, AS DID HIS WIFE AND FAMILY, HE WAS THEREFORE KILLED. THE INTENTION, SAID TARAKI, HAD BEEN TO TAKE HIM AS A CAPTIVE. TARAKI ADDED THAT DAUD PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN COURT-MARTIALED AND POSSIBLY SHOT. TARAKI HAD YESTERDAY VISITED THE HOSPITAL OF THE AMERICAN-OPERATED SOLDIER WHO HAD BEEN SHOT BY DAUD'S "WHITE PISTOL."

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4. TARAKI THEN SAID HE WAS SURPRISED THAT I HAD NOT BEEN THE FIRST AMBASSADOR TO CALL ON HIM, BECAUSE WHAT HE IS TRYING TO ESTABLISH IN AFGHANISTAN IS A "GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE." CORRECTING HIMSELF A BIT, HE SAID HE HAD ASKED THE SAME QUESTION OF THE PAKISTANI AMBASSADOR BECAUSE PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN HAVE SO MUCH IN COMMON, CULTURALLY AND ETHNICALLY.

5. I THEN EXPLAINED THAT IN CASES LIKE THIS, WE DO NOT EXTEND FORMAL RECOGNITION BUT INDICATE, AS WE HAVE DONE, THAT WE WANT TO CONTINUE NORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. I SAID, IN FACT, WE HOPE TO HAVE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONS WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT. I ADDED, AS OUR NOTE STATED, THAT I HOPE HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE A CHANCE SOON TO AFFIRM THE VALIDITY OF EXISTING TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS. HE MADE NO COMMENT ON THAT SUGGESTION.

6. AT SEVERAL POINTS DURING THESE PRELIMINARY EXCHANGES, TARAKI REFERRED TO THE TIME HE HAD SPENT IN THE UNITED STATES, HIS FRIENDSHIP FOR AMERICANS, AND HIS LIKING FOR THE AMERICAN QUALITY OF FRANKNESS. WE AGREED THAT AFGHANS AND AMERICANS HAVE LOTS IN COMMON IN THIS REGARD.

7. I THEN STATED I WANTED TO BE FRANK WITH HIM. I SAID THAT, AS HE KNEW, THE UNITED STATES HAD NEVER SOUGHT ANY STRATEGIC OR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE FROM AFGHANISTAN. HE AGREED. I SAID THAT ONE OF THE CARDINAL POINTS OF OUR POLICY IS TO HELP AFGHANISTAN MAINTAIN ITS INDEPENDENCE, ITS INTEGRITY, AND ITS NATIONAL IDENTITY. HE NODDED ENTHUSIASTICALLY. I SAID THAT SINCE THE BRITISH LEFT INDIA, IT WAS OUR VIEW THAT THE ONLY COUNTRY THAT COULD POSSIBLY THREATEN AFGHANISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE IS THE SOVIET UNION. IN PAST TIMES, I NOTED, OUR POLICY HAD BEEN TO TRY TO CONSTRUCT BLOCs AGAINST SOVIET EXPANSIONISM, BUT THAT OUR APPROACH TO THIS PROBLEM HAD, IN THE COURSE OF TIME BECOME MORE SOPHISTICATED.

I STATED WE COULD READILY UNDERSTAND -- GIVEN AFGHANISTAN'S GEOGRAPHIC POSITION AND ECONOMIC NEEDS -- WHY IT WOULD WANT A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION. BUT, I SAID, WE WOULD BE DISTURBED IF AFGHANISTAN'S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICIES WERE TO BECOME INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THOSE OF THE SOVIET UNION BECAUSE THAT WOULD OBLITERATE AFGHANISTAN'S NATIONAL IDENTITY AND WOULD GIVE RISE TO TENSIONS IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD WHICH WOULD THREATEN PEACE. I SAID THAT IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT WE APPRECIATE AFGHANISTAN'S NONALIGNED POLICY.

8. IN RESPONSE, TARAKI AFFIRMED THAT AFGHANISTAN IS AND DESIRES TO REMAIN AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY AND MASTER OF ITS OWN DESTINY. HE SAID HE WAS PLEASED THAT THE UNITED STATES TAKES A MORE FLEXIBLE VIEW OF THE WORLD AND ADMITS, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT IT MADE A MISTAKE IN VIETNAM. HE REFERRED TO HIS BEING IN WASHINGTON DURING THE DAYS OF SENATOR MCCARTHY, AND NOTED THAT THE THEN VICE PRESIDENT NIXON HAD REFUSED ONCE TO COME TO AN AFGHAN EMBASSY RECEPTION BECAUSE AFGHANISTAN WAS TOO CLOSE TO THE SOVIET UNION. HE WAS PLEASED THAT THAT IS NO LONGER THE APPROACH THE UNITED STATES TAKES TOWARD HIS COUNTRY.

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9. I THEN SAID THAT IN EVALUATING THE POLICIES OF A GOVERNMENT IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY LIKE AFGHANISTAN, THE UNITED STATES WOULD LOOK FIRST AND FOREMOST AT WHAT THAT GOVERNMENT IS DOING TO RAISE THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF ITS PEOPLE AND TO ASSURE THE MAINTENANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS -- ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND LEGAL. AT THIS POINT, TARAKI BECAME MUCH MORE ANIMATED AND HELD FORTH AT SOME LENGTH ON THE SUBJECT OF HOW HIS GOVERNMENT WANTS TO HELP THE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN. HE SAID THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES -- UNLIKE HIS PREDECESSORS, REALLY CARE ABOUT THE POOR PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY AND HAVE NO INTEREST IN PUTTING MONEY IN SWISS BANKS. HE SAID THAT IN JUDGING HIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, WE SHOULD ASK THE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN WHETHER THEY THINK THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL. IN THE PAST, HE BELIEVED FOREIGNERS TENDED TO TSK THE ARISTOCRATS WHO, OF COURSE, WERE NOT INTERESTED IN HELPING THE POOR BECAUSE SUCH A POLICY WOULD THREATEN THEIR OWN PROSPERITY. REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS, TARAKI SAID THIS IS A VERY COMPLICATED PROBLEM AND THAT EACH NATION MUST JUDGE FOR ITSELF THE KIND OF HUMAN RIGHTS THAT ARE MOST SUITED TO ITS OWN SITUATION AND CULTURE. HE MADE IT CRYSTAL CLEAR THAT HE WOULD NOT WANT US TO MAKE VALUE JUDGMENTS WHICH WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO INTERFERENCE IN AFGHANISTAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. I ASSURED HIM THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS NO DESIRE TO TRY TO TRANSPLANT ITS GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM ELSEWHERE, BUT THAT WE, NEVERTHELESS, CARE DEEPLY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS.

10. TARAKI THEN SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD JUDGE OTHER GOVERNMENTS BY THEIR WILLINGNESS TO HELP AFGHANISTAN. HE SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS HAD NOT YET BEEN FORMULATED, BUT THAT HE WOULD BE ASKING US FOR ASSISTANCE AS, INDEED, HE WOULD BE ASKING THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER COUNTRIES. HE SAID THAT THE PRINCIPAL SLOGAN, ADDING THAT HE REALLY MEANT POLICY AND NOT SLOGAN, OF HIS GOVERNMENT IS TO PROVIDE BREAD, CLOTHING, AND SHELTER FOR THE MASSES. I DESCRIBED OUR AID PROGRAM OF RECENT YEARS AND ITS EMPHASIS ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND AGRICULTURE FOR THE RURAL POOR. HE SAID HE WOULD TELL ME, AS HE HAD TOLD THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR, THAT OUR RESPECTIVE AID PROGRAMS HAD FAILED, AND THAT THE FAILURE WAS DUE TO THE LACK OF COMMITMENT OF THE PREVIOUS REGIME. I SAID I AGREED WITH HIM THAT OUR AID PROGRAM HAD NOT ACHIEVED ITS GOALS. HE ASKED ME WHY. I REPLIED THAT HE KNEW HIS OWN COUNTRY BETTER THAN I, AND THAT I WOULD MERELY SAY THAT THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT WAS NOT CAPABLE OF IMPLEMENTING THE KIND OF PROGRAM THAT WE WISHED TO SEE IMPLEMENTED. HE OBVIOUSLY TOOK GREAT PLEASURE IN MY SAYING THIS.

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11. TARAKI THEN SAID HE WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT I UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE MEANT BY "BREAD". HE SAID HE WANTS TO PROVIDE JOBS FOR THE THOUSANDS OF AFGHANS WHO HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY TO WORK IN IGROMINY ABROAD. THIS WILL MEAN THE CONSTRUCTION OF INDUSTRY AND INFRA-STRUCTURE, AND HE HOPED WE WOULD HELP WITH THAT. I TOLD HIM THAT ONCE THE APPROPRIATE MINISTERS IN HIS GOVERNMENT WERE PREPARED TO DISCUSS SUCH MATTERS WITH US, MY AID MISSION DIRECTOR AND I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DO SO.

12. I THEN SAID THAT ONE OTHER MATTER OF IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITED STATES IS THE STABILITY OF THIS REGION OF THE WORLD. I SAID WE HAVE BEEN DELIGHTED AT THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE IN RECENT YEARS IN DEVELOPING REGIONAL COOPERATION. TARAKI SAID THAT THAT WAS, OF COURSE, A MATTER THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD BE STUDYING. HE ALSO SAID THAT WHEN ONE TALKS OF REGIONAL CO-OPERATION, THAT MEANS NOT ONLY COOPERATION WITH INDIA, PAKISTAN, AND IRAN -- BUT ALSO WITH THE SOVIET UNION.

13. THE CONVERSATION ENDED WITH PLEASANTRIES AS IT HAD BEGUN. HE SAID THAT HE HOPED THE SOVIET UNION WOULD NOT JUDGE HIM BADLY IF HE BUILT MORE MOSQUES BY THE SAME TOWN. HE HOPED WE WOULD NOT JUDGE HIM BADLY IF HE, HIMSELF, DID NOT GO TO A MOSQUE. HE CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT EVERYTHING HE HAD TOLD ME HE HAD ALSO TOLD THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR.

14. COMMENT: TARAKI IS A SLIM, WHITE-HAIRED, PROFESSORIAL MAN WHO LOOKS SOMEWHAT OLDER THAN 61. HE HAS THE CHAM AND EMPATHY THAT ONE LEARNS TO ASSOCIATE WITH AFGHANS. HE IS ALSO CLEARLY KNOXHEADED AND EXHILARATED BY HIS SUCCESS. WHEN HE IS PARTICULARLY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A POINT HE IS MAKING, HIS EYES ASSUME A FIERCE, ECSTASYNATICAL INTENSITY. OUR CONVERSATION WAS EXTREMELY CORDIAL AND WAS ALSO, I THINK, A REAL DIALOG.

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